

JOVE REX AL: THE MAKING OF FILIPINO CHRIST

**By: Palmo R. Iya
Faculty, Social Sciences Department
College of Liberal Arts
De La Salle University-Dasmariñas
Dasmariñas City, Cavite 4115, Philippines**

**Email Add: priya@dlsud.edu.ph
Contact No: (0933)1671764**

**The Asian Conference on Ethics, Religion and Philosophy (ACERP) 2012
March 30 - 1 April, 2012, Osaka, Japan**

JOVE REX AL¹ : THE MAKING OF FILIPINO CHRIST

Palmo R. Iya, Faculty, Social Sciences Department, College of Liberal Arts
De La Salle University-Dasmariñas, Philippines

Abstract

This paper posits two significant revelations why Dr. Jose P. Rizal, the Philippine national hero is regarded by the Rizalista groups as “God” or “Christ” Himself. First, Filipino culture has something to do with it; and second, American imperialism had paved the way to reinforce this veneration and worship for Rizal by some Filipinos.

This paper argues that the common Filipino concept of God is influenced by culture and that the Filipino people themselves have contextualized “Christ” to make Him more relevant by believing that Rizal is still alive and he is the reincarnated Christ, the *Jove Rex Al*.

This paper further contends that American imperialistic campaign through the Taft Commission (1901) was able to utilize power and ideology to create that perfect image of Rizal over Bonifacio, Jacinto, del Pilar and other Filipino heroes. By proclaiming Rizal as the Philippine national hero, the Taft Commission succeeded in giving the Filipino people a national hero whose major thesis for reform was education, not a revolution. Thus, the sponsorship and institutionalization of Rizal by the Americans played a major role in encouraging a Rizal cult.

Key Words: *Jove Rex Al*, Christ, Rizalista, Folk Christianity, culture, anitism, *anito*, imperialism

Introduction

Culture is the way people make sense of or give meaning to the world. It consists of the maps of meanings or the frameworks of intelligibility that the members of a specific cultural society share together.² It is the people themselves who construct or reconstruct things or events to look for meanings and significance. Human beings socially do not construct meanings at the spur of the moment on a whim. They do so in patterned ways, drawing on experiences shaped by their own cultures, their own social structures and their own history.³

Moreso, Stuart Hall claims that the issue of power can never be bracketed out from the question of representation. Meaning is interpretation and the purpose of power, the

¹ The Latin name of Dr. Jose P. Rizal according to the Rizalista groups; Jove – meaning God, Rex – King, and Al – All. In short, Jove Rex Al means God King of All. See Prospero R. Covar, *Larangan: Seminal Essays on Philippine Culture*. (Manila: Sampaguita Press, Inc., 1998), p. 46.

² Stuart Hall, *Representation and the Media*. (Media Education Foundation, 2005), p. 9.

³ Ponciano L. Bennagen, *Constructing and Reconstructing Meanings: By Whom and For Whom?* in the foreword of the book edited by John P. McAndrew, *Monks, Dreamers, Preachers, and Rebels: Religious Solutions to the Problem of Meaning in a Peripheral Capitalist Society* (Malate, Manila: Asian Social Institute, Inc., 1987) p. vii.

ambition of ideology, is to fix a particular meaning to a specific image. Power consists in choosing one meaning among many that serves its particular interests. Therefore, according to Hall, ideology and power fix meaning.⁴

From the above premises, two significant revelations will be posited by the author on why Dr. Jose P. Rizal, the Philippine national hero is regarded by the Rizalista⁵ groups as “God” or “Christ” Himself. First, Filipino culture has something to do with it; and second, American imperialism had paved the way to reinforce this veneration and worship for Rizal by some Filipinos.

This paper argues that the common Filipino concept of God is influenced by culture and that the Filipino people themselves have contextualized “Christ” to make Him more relevant by believing that Rizal is still alive and he is the reincarnated “Christ”, the *Jove Rex Al*. Since anitism, the veneration of ancestors is the core of Filipino religious culture; worshipping a great person like Rizal and making him “Christ” is inevitable. It further contends that American imperialistic campaign through the Taft Commission⁶ was able to utilize power and ideology to create that perfect image of Jose Rizal over Andres Bonifacio, Emilio Jacinto, Marcelo del Pilar and other Filipino heroes. By proclaiming Rizal as the Philippine national hero during the time when war between the Philippines and the United States of America was still in hype, the Taft Commission succeeded in giving the Filipino people a national hero whose major thesis for reform was education, not a revolution. Thus, the sponsorship and institutionalization of Rizal by the Americans played a major role in encouraging a Rizal cult.

I. The Making of Filipino Christ Within the Filipino Culture

Although the title “Tagalog Christ” was already given in 1907 by the Spanish writer and philosopher Miguel de Unamuno⁷ to Dr. Jose Rizal (1861-1896), such title was not a monopoly by the Philippine national hero alone. Apolinario de la Cruz (1814-1841) of Tayabas, Quezon, popularly known as Hermano Pule, who founded a religious confraternity named Cofradia de San Jose was considered a “Tagalog Christ” by his followers. Even Felipe Salvador (1870-1910) of Bulacan, who organized a cofradia-type of society called Santa Iglesia was considered also by his followers as a “Filipino Christ” and as the “King of the Philippines”. This Santa Iglesia was not only a religion but also a

⁴ Stuart Hall, *Representation and the Media*. (Media Education Foundation, 2005), p. 14.

⁵ Those Filipino groups who believe that Rizal is God or Christ Himself such as the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi*, *Bathalismo (Inang Mahiwaga)*, *Adarnista o Iglesyang Pilipinas*, *Iglesia Sagrada Filipina ng Sinco Vucales y Virtudes Tierra Santa de Jerusalem*. For details, see the books by Marcelino A. Foronda, *Cults Honoring Rizal* (Manila: Garcia Publishing Co., 1961), and Prospero R. Covar, *Larangan: Seminal Essays on Philippine Culture*. (Manila: Sampaguita Press, Inc., 1998).

⁶ Headed by William Howard Taft, the first American Civil Governor in the Philippines, the Taft Commission in 1901 recommended that the Philippines should have a national hero. The members of the commission include both Americans and Filipinos: W. Morgan Shuster, Bernard Moses, Dean Worcester, Henry Clay Ide – these four Americans occupied different positions in the departments of the American civil government in the Philippines. The Filipino elite members were Trinidad Pardo de Tavera, Gregorio Araneta, Cayetano Arellano, and Jose Luzuriaga – all agitating to make the Philippines a state of America.

⁷ Pablo S. Trillana, III, *Rizal and Heroic Traditions: A Sense of National Destiny* (Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2006) p. 38.

strong political movement between 1894 and 1910 in Central Luzon. Hilario Camino Moncado (1898-1956) of Balamban, Cebu was considered a second Christ by the members of the sect he established, the Equifrilibicum World Religion, Inc., or better known as the Moncadista religion. Even Ruben Ecleo (1934-1987), the founder of the Philippine Benevolent Missionaries Association in San Jose, Dinagat Island, Surigao del Norte was believed by his followers to be the reincarnation of Christ.⁸

The above informations reveal that there are various versions of Christs in these different Filipino indigenous religious groups. However, it is not the intent of the author to discuss the common denominator, patterns and the historical sequence of these religious groups but to lay down what really is the Filipino idea of God and how it is influenced by his culture.

Understanding Philippine Society and Culture

In dealing with the Philippine situation, one must put into consideration the pre-colonial and colonial past of the Filipino people. By so doing, it could be easily understood that the common concept of God is influenced by culture and that the idea of God and of the afterworld is a reflection of Philippine society.

Jocano, one of the Philippines' leading anthropologists, has surveyed Filipino society and culture before and at the beginning of Spanish colonization which started in 1565. His survey of the various ethnic groups from Luzon to Mindanao reveals a common pattern about the early Filipino concept of God. A supreme God (*Bathala* for the Tagalogs, *Laon* or *Abba* for the Bisayans, *Kabunian* for the Ilokanos) exists with lesser divinities and the departed. The people worship God through the lesser divinities or spirits and the departed as intermediaries.⁹ These spirits known as *anitos* are no other than the dead parents or ancestors whom the early Filipinos considered as their "secondary gods on earth". According to De los Reyes, *anitos* are considered as saints being venerated by the Filipinos as they were the soul of their ancestors who were men of virtues. He further claimed that it is to their ancestors whom the Filipinos put their trust that they may watch over their homes and safeguard their families.¹⁰ To these *anitos*, the people offered sacrifices. The *babaylan* (priestess) offered heaps of rice, meat, and fish. The *babaylan*'s invocation lasted until the *anito* possessed her. She swooned and foamed at the mouth. Upon recovery, the native would ask the *babaylan* for the answers that the *anito* had given her to their requests.

The Augustinian friar, Tomas Ortiz in his book entitled *Practica del Ministerio* described Filipino anitism, the belief and worship of the Filipino natives to their ancestors which he termed *Nono* as contrary to the "truth":

⁸ Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD, *Christ in the Philippines* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1982), pp. 31-45.

⁹ F. Landa Jocano, *Filipino Prehistory: Rediscovering Precolonial Heritage*. (Quezon City: PUNLAD Research House, Inc., 1998), pp. 183-185.

¹⁰ Isabelo de los Reyes, *The Religion of the Katipunan or The Old Beliefs of the Filipinos* in the book by Teresita A. Alcantara et al., *Views on Philippine Revolution Vol. I* (Quezon City: The Toyota Foundation, UP Press, 2002), pp. 222, 279.

The natives have many abusive practices that run counter to our faith and good customs, and among these are the following: First, the Idolatry of the Nono, about which it should be known that the word Nono not only signifies grandfather but also serves as a term of respect for ancestors and tutelary spirits (genios); those that the Indios have under the name Nono are like those that the Chinese have under the name of Spirits; and that the Romans had under the name of gods, which others called Lares or Penates, etc. With these tutelary spirits or Nono, the Indios carry on frequent idolatrous practices; for example, they ask them for permission, help, aid, and that they not be harmed by them as well as by their enemies, etc., things that they do on so many occasions, and among these are the following: When they want to take some flower or fruit from a tree, they ask permission from the *Nono* or tutelary spirit; as when they want to pass through some field, river, brook, stream, or by a huge tree...When they fall ill with some malady...that they attribute to the tutelary spirit or Nono, they ask them for health, and make offerings of food, which they carry out on this occasion, among many others, in fields, on fishing boats, along riverbanks, at the foot of some big tree...This kind of Idolatry is extensively rooted and quite ancient among the Indios...¹¹

Idols were carved in representation of these spirits (*anitos* or *nonos*). Aside from offering them foods, these idols were annointed with “fragrant perfumes, such as musk and civet, or gums of the storax tree and other odoriferous woods, and they praised them in poetic songs sung by the officiating priestess, the *babaylan*. The purpose of these songs participated in both by the *babaylan* and the congregation, was always to ask the idol to favor them with those things of which they were in need. Not only were idols perfumed but they were also dressed, comparatively in the same manner as the contemporary Christian saints are dressed.¹² Aside from this, Plasencia notes that “at times they worshipped any little trifle in which they adored as did the Romans, some particular dead men who were brave in war and endowed with special faculties to whom they

¹¹ Tomas Ortiz, *Practica del Ministerio* (Manila: Convento de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles, 1731), pp. 11-12. See also Vicente L. Rafael, *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule* (Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000), pp. 111-112.

¹² F. Landa Jocano, ed. *The Philippines at the Spanish Contact: Some Major Accounts of Early Filipino Society and Culture* (Quezon City: Institute of Philippine Studies, Philippine Center for Advanced Studies, UP System, 1975), pp. 40-41.

commended themselves for protection in their tribulations.”¹³ What is being referred here as dead men being worshipped are actually the *bagani* or the warriors who served as protectors of their barangays or communities and that the early Filipinos considered as gods who would protect them in the time of trouble.

Jocano holds that in spite of colonization, Filipinos have still retained their identity and outlook. This is to say that Filipinos have not been passive to external influences but rather, they absorbed those external influences and fashioned them according to what pleased or best accommodated to their liking.

It cannot be denied that the Filipino borrowed cultural traits from other people whom he came in contact with. But it is equally true that he did not borrow in toto. He was (and still is) highly selective in his borrowings. He modified what he has chosen from foreign traditions to suit his own way of thinking, believing and doing things. Thus, while he outwardly shows the influence of the West in his behavior, he remains oriental in his worldview.¹⁴

Mercado argues that what was said of the pre-colonial Filipinos also applies much today – if not almost everything among the indigenous Filipino groups and folk Christians. Veneration of ancestors is still the central component of religious culture among the *Sulods* of Panay in Visayas, *Hinonuo Mangyans* of Mindoro, the Catholics of Central Visayas and Mindanao, and folk Catholics of upland Cavite in Luzon.¹⁵

General Characterization of Folk Christianity in the Philippines

For Covar, there are three distinct religious traditions in the Philippines that demand scrutiny in order to understand Filipino religious psychology. They are: (1.) Roman Catholicism, (2.) American Protestantism, and (3.) Filipino animism. The first two traditions did not grow in the Philippines in their pure forms. In the process of taking root, they were indigenized.¹⁶

Covar maintains that in numerous instances, the three religious traditions are blended into a new whole. He called this new blending as Folk Christianity.¹⁷ In particular, Filipino Folk Christianity refers to a religious organization that is local in origin and maintaining itself as an indigenous unit. It is neither a schism from the Roman Catholic Church nor is it associated with any American Protestant denomination or other foreign missions. It

¹³ Juan de Plasencia, *Customs of the Tagalogs: A Relation* (Manila: in Blair and Robertson, VII, 1589), p. 189.

¹⁴ F. Landa Jocano, *Philippine Pre-history: An Anthropological Overview of the Beginnings of Filipino Society and Culture* (Quezon City: Philippine Center for Advanced Studies, 1975), p. xiii.

¹⁵ Leonardo N. Mercado, SVD, *Christ in the Philippines* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1982), pp. 5-8.

¹⁶ Prospero R. Covar, *Philippine Folk Christianity* (Quezon City: Philippine Social Science Council, 1975), p. 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

draws its central doctrine from the mainspring of Christian teachings – oftentimes proselytizing based on Biblical passages and moralized by Filipino parables and *salawikain*¹⁸. It believes in anitism¹⁹ and lower creatures. It indulges in spiritism and faith-healing. It manifests a kind of nationalist orientation that is inspired by the writings of Rizal and other heroes of the Philippine Revolution. It utilizes either the Roman Catholic hierarchy of positions or the American Protestant council of elders as a structural model upon which it patterns its leadership set-up.²⁰

The History of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi*, A Glimpse

Allegedly, it was Arsenio de Guzman who started to preach to the Filipino people that Dr. Jose P. Rizal was the “Christ” and the “messenger of God”. From Mindanao to Visayas, he foretold that God had chosen the Philippines to be His New Kingdom replacing Israel. In 1911, the *Samahang Watawat ng Lahi* (Association of the Banner of the Race) was formed in Masbate by the fifteen Philippine national heroes together with De Guzman.²¹ Father Bolante and Engr. Relleta of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc. – Malvarosa Faction* disclosed that it was actually the spirit of Rizal who is working with Arsenio de Guzman – telling the people to act virtuously in consonance with Christ’s and Dr. Jose Rizal’s teachings. This *Simulain* (Principle) was to propagate in Lecheria Hill, Calamba, Laguna in 1936.

In a house at Galas, Quezon City, sometime in 1936, a certain Severino de Ang invoked the presence of the *Banal na Tinig* (Holy Voice).²² The *Banal na Tinig* instructed Mateo Alcuran and Alfredo Benedicto to go to Lecheria, Calamba, Laguna to look for Jovito Salgado and Gaudioso Parabuac. These four men, all middle age, met on Lecheria Hill in Calamba on December 24, 1936. They heeded the call of the *Banal na Tinig* (Holy Voice) expecting to find buried treasure for Lecheria Hill was known as *Burol na Ginto* (Hill of Gold). But to their surprise, the *Banal na Tinig* admonished them to discontinue their search for buried treasure and prevailed upon them to seek the wealth of eternal life in the hereafter. From that time on, these four men met and listened faithfully to the moral teachings of the *Banal na Tinig* every Saturday afternoon in a small nipa hut near a big tamarind tree at the eastern side of the hill. The *Banal na Tinig* drew its early recruits

¹⁸ *Salawikain* is synonymous to maxim, saying or proverb. For details, see Prospero R. Covar, *Philippine Folk Christianity* (Quezon City: Philippine Social Science Council, 1975).

¹⁹ Anitism – congeries of beliefs and practices related to “*anito*”, “*nono*” or the spirit of dead parents/ancestors which is the core of Filipino religious culture.

²⁰ Prospero R. Covar, *Philippine Folk Christianity* (Quezon City: Philippine Social Science Council, 1975), pp. 3-4.

²¹ Interview with Rev. Vicar Eusebio O. Bolante and Engr. Bonifacio T. Relleta, Parochial Priest and General President respectively of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc. – Malvarosa Faction*, Central Church Headquarter located in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines on May 20, 2011. The (15) national heroes are: 1. Father Mariano Gomez, 2. Father Jacinto Zamora, 3. Father Jose Burgos, 4. Marcelo H. del Pilar, 5. Gen. Miguel Malvar, 6. Gen. Gregorio del Pilar, 7. Andres Bonifacio, 8. Emilio Jacinto, 9. Graciano Lopez Jaena, 10. Apolinario Mabini, 11. Mariano Ponce, 12. Antonio Regidor, 13. Juan Luna, 14. Gen. Antonio Luna, and 15. Jose Maria Basa.

²² According to Father Bolante, the *Banal na Tinig* (Holy Voice) is no other than the Voice of God Himself. It is the same Holy Voice which Adam & Eve heard in the Garden of Eden. This is the Holy Voice which was heard by Moses commanding him to lead the people of Israel to go out of Egypt.

from a mixture of lawyers, mystics, and skilled craftsmen. More and more people became interested in the moral lessons propounded by the Holy Voice.²³

In 1938, the *Banal na Tinig* informed the group that the spirit²⁴ of Dr. Jose Rizal would be their *patnubay* or guide together with the *Mga Mahal na Magulang* (Beloved Ancestors).²⁵ In 1940, the *Banal na Tinig* instructed the group to organize into a movement called the *Samahan ng Watawat ng Lahi* (Association of the Banner of the Race). However, the word *Samahan* (Association) was changed to *Iglesia* to avoid suspicion by the Japanese soldiers during the Second World War.

In 1947, two priests of the *Universa Dei Ecclesia* joined the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi*. This gave rise within the Church, to a priesthood and to formal rites and rituals patterned after those of the Roman Catholic Church. By 1959, one of the priests had risen to the position of bishop and an ecclesiastical body complemented the original secular structure of the Church. It established offices commonly associated with socio-civic groups which are unmistakably American-Protestant in origin, while the traditional religious roles which are traceable from the *Simulain* (Principle) are the adviser who actually is the invoker, and the members of the *Kagawad* (Council). In the 1970's, the movement continued to build up its organizational structure, routinized its rites and rituals and expanded its membership.²⁶

In 1987, however, the group in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba, Laguna was racked by schism among members and was, after tedious legal battles, eventually divided into three factions: the *Watawat ng Lahi* also known as *Samahan ng Watawat ng Lahi Presiding Elders* headed by Dr. Luis Parabuac, Sr., the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc. – Malvarosa Faction* (IWL – Priesthood), now led by Engr. Bonifacio T. Relleta, and the *Iglesia ng Lipi ni Gat Dr. Jose P. Rizal, Inc.* headed by Engr. Ramir Larino. The first group discredits the role of the bishops and priests in the *Samahan* (Association) and teaches that Rizal is no longer Christ/God but only human, while the other two are still united in their common belief that Rizal is “God” or “Christ” Himself, the “Alpha and the Omega”, the *Jove Rex Al* (God, King of All).²⁷ The last two groups both claim that they hold the original trademark of the old *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi* in terms of its doctrines, teachings

²³ Interview with Rev. Vicar Eusebio O. Bolante, parochial priest of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc. – Malvarosa Faction*. Can be read also in Prospero R. Covar, *Philippine Folk Christianity* (Quezon City: Philippine Social Science Council, 1975), pp. 43-45.

²⁴ This belief in spirit has a long tradition in Philippine culture as elaborated in the above topic, “Understanding Philippine Society and Culture”.

²⁵ The Beloved Ancestors are the (15) national heroes whom together with Arsenio de Guzman (Rizal medium) established the Association and its *Simulain* (Principle) in Masbate but to propagate as a movement in Lecheria, Calamba, Laguna, Philippines starting 1936.

²⁶ Prospero R. Covar, *Religious Leadership in the Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi* in the book edited by Leonardo N. Mercado, *Filipino Religious Psychology* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1977), pp. 109-126.

²⁷ Interview with Rev. Vicar Eusebio O. Bolante. Separate interviews were done also with Mrs. Luvisinda Balocon, vice-president of the *Iglesia ng Lipi ni Gat Dr. Jose P. Rizal, Inc.* and Mr. Norito Cabotaje, member of the Council of Elders of the *Watawat ng Lahi-Parabuac Faction* and at the same time assistant to Dr. Luis Parabuac, the concurrent leader of the group on May 13, 2011 at their respective church headquarters located also in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines. See pictures in the Appendix.

and worldviews. For the purpose of this paper, the religious views of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc. – Malvarosa Faction* and the *Iglesia ng Lipi ni Gat Dr. Jose P. Rizal, Inc.* were applied as both groups still believe that Rizal is “God” or “Christ” Himself, the “Alpha and the Omega”, the *Jove Rex Al*.

Jove Rex Al of the Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi

The *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi*²⁸ is one of the many indigenous religious organizations in the Philippines. Its central doctrine revolves around Dr. Jose Rizal, the Philippine national hero. Rizal is considered to be the “reincarnation” of Jesus Christ and believed that Rizal is “God” Himself taking on a human form, much like what Jesus Christ did 2,000 years ago. “Reincarnation” is interpreted to mean that Jose Rizal and Jesus Christ led parallel lives. Both were conceived by the virgin, were Asians, advocated the equality of all human beings, were born in a small country under a foreign rule, performed miracles, advocated the Golden Rule, healed people, were maligned and persecuted, and gave up their lives for the people.²⁹

Rizal is still alive! The Rizalistas believe that the man executed in Bagumbayan (now Luneta, Manila) in the morning of December 30, 1896 was a fake Rizal. The genuine Rizal could never be killed as he possessed supernatural powers. Through magical powers, Rizal had created a duplicate of himself out of the banana trunk he requested from the jail guard, giving him the opportunity to slip out of prison cell and left the fake Rizal in prison.³⁰

Nowadays, given the scenario of the enormity of humanity’s problems – environmental, medical, economic, political, and moral – Rizalistas are highly convinced that the end of the world and the second coming of *Jove Rex Al*, the Filipino Christ is nigh. They also anticipate the establishment of the golden church, the golden palace, and the golden flag. All these things shall appear at Mount Makiling overlooking Lecheria Hill in Calamba, Laguna, Philippines.³¹

At this juncture, I would like to settle down my major premise why Dr. Jose Rizal is viewed as “Christ” by some Filipinos. We began with the Filipino idea of God and saw how it is influenced by culture. Worldview is colored by culture. People are the contextualizers and the picture of Christ is based on what is meaningful for the Filipinos. Simply put, if Christ was born in Japan or in the United States of America and not in Palestine, our Christianity today would have a Japanese or American viewpoint. But since he was born a Jew, he preached in the viewpoint of a Jew. Hence, if Christ was born in the Philippines, he would certainly have preached from the viewpoint of a

²⁸ *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi* literally means Church of the Banner of the Race. Its central office is located at Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines.

²⁹ For more details, see Prospero R. Covar, *Larangan: Seminal Essays on Philippine Culture*. National Commission for Culture and the Arts (Manila: Sampaguita Press, Inc., 1998), pp. 102-103.

³⁰ Interview with Rev. Vicar Eusebio O. Bolante.

³¹ Ibid. See also Prospero R. Covar, *Religious Leadership in the Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi* in the book edited by Leonardo N. Mercado, *Filipino Religious Psychology* (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1977), p. 109.

Filipino. Therefore, making Jesus Christ a Filipino through Rizal would mean a more relevant type of Filipino Christian Religion.

II. The American Imperialistic Campaign for Rizal

It was on June 12, 1898 when the Filipino people through the leadership of President Emilio Aguinaldo proclaimed their independence over Spain. However, the end of Spanish colonial rule in 1898, by virtue of the Treaty of Paris³², did not mean for the Filipinos the end of their independence struggle. Clearly, the transfer of sovereignty from one power to another was a unilateral action to which the duly constituted Filipino government was not at all involved. What therefore followed American political and military entry into the Philippines was the establishment of a kind of system that was imperialistic in nature.³³

Tan discloses that the establishment of American colonial rule was based on policies and programs comprehensive enough to allow American presence throughout the archipelago. American colonial policies were expressed initially in the “Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation” of President William McKinley of the United States on December 21, 1898. In this proclamation, the United States declared her intention to establish sovereignty over the Philippines but would endeavor to pursue a humane policy to assimilate the colony. Note that this declaration came after the formation of the Malolos Congress, the legislative body of the Philippine Republic under President Emilio Aguinaldo. Shortly thereafter, the Schurman Commission, sent to the Philippines in 1899 to assess the situation, reiterated the American commitment to pursue a policy that would respect the customs and traditions of the Filipino people. This change in policy came at a time when tensions were moving toward the possible outbreak of hostilities as the Malolos Government showed its determination to attain Philippine independence. When the first shot was fired from an American gun at San Juan Bridge on February 4, 1899, killing a Filipino, the Philippine-American war formally begun.

The refusal of the Filipinos to yield and the determination to continue the struggle prompted the organization on April 7, 1900, of a second Philippine Commission under William H. Taft to serve as a government in itself. Tan states that the instruction of President McKinley, conveyed through Secretary of War Elihu Root, was to establish in the colony not a government for the “theoretical satisfaction of the American people,” but for the “happiness and prosperity of the Filipino people,” one that would respect the customs, habits, traditions, and even the prejudices of the people.³⁴

³² The Treaty of Paris of December 10, 1898 which the Philippines was ceded to the United States of America by Spain for US \$ 20 million revealed the real color of America as the new imperialist nation.

³³ Samuel K. Tan, *A History of the Philippines* (Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 1987), p. 65.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

To the Americans, the eventual capture and surrender of Gen. Emilio Aguinaldo at Palanan, Isabela, in 1901 removed the political obstacle to the enforcement of their sovereignty over the Philippines despite the fact that many patriotic Filipinos were still heroically fighting against them even until 1913.

What was more surprising to know that in 1901, during the hype of conflict between the Filipinos and the Americans, the American Civil Governor William H. Taft suggested to the Philippine Commission that the Filipinos be given a national hero. Constantino, the late Filipino nationalist historian exposed the account of a meeting by the Taft Commission published in the *Free Press* of December 28, 1946:

“And now, gentlemen, you must have a national hero”... In these fateful words, addressed by then Civil Governor W. H. Taft to the Filipino members of the civil commission, Pardo de Tavera, Legarda, Arellano, and Luzuriaga, lay the genesis of Rizal Day...

In the subsequent discussion in which the rival merits of the revolutionary heroes were considered, the final choice – now universally acclaimed a wise one – was Rizal. And so was history made.³⁵

Constantino quoting Theodore Friend in his book, *Between Two Empires*, says that Taft “with other American colonial officials and some conservative wealthy Filipinos, chose Rizal as a model hero over other contestants – Aguinaldo too militant, Bonifacio too radical, Mabini too unregenerate.”³⁶ This decision to sponsor Rizal was implemented with the passage of the following Acts of the Philippine Commission:

1. Act No. 137 – which organized the politico-military district of Morong and named it the province of Rizal “in honor of the most illustrious Filipino and the most illustrious Tagalog the islands had ever known,”
2. Act No. 243 – which authorized a public subscription for the erection of a monument in honor of Rizal at the Luneta, and
3. Act No. 345 – which set aside the anniversary of his death as a day of observance.³⁷

This early example of American “aid” is summarized by Governor General Cameron Forbes who wrote in his book, *The Philippine Islands*:

It is eminently proper that Rizal should have become the acknowledged national hero of the Philippine people. The American administration has lent every assistance to this recognition, setting aside

³⁵ The Free Press, December 28, 1946 in Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (Quezon City: Malaya Books Inc., 1970), p. 128.

³⁶ Theodore Friend, *Between Two Empires* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965), p. 15. In the book of Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (Quezon City: Malaya Books Inc., 1970), p. 128.

³⁷ Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (Quezon City: Malaya Books Inc., 1970), pp. 128-129.

the anniversary of his death to be a day of observance, placing his picture on the postage stamp most commonly used in the islands, and on the currency...and throughout the islands the public schools to teach the young Filipinos to revere his memory as the greatest of Filipino patriots.³⁸

The reason for the enthusiastic American attitude becomes clear in the following appraisal of Rizal by Forbes:

Rizal never advocated independence, nor did he advocate armed resistance to the government. He urged reform from within by publicity, by public education, and appeal to the public conscience.³⁹

Constantino asserts that Taft's appreciation for Rizal has much the same basis, as evidenced by his calling Rizal "the greatest Filipino, a physician, a novelist and a poet who because of his struggle for a better conditions under Spanish rule, was unjustly convicted and shot."⁴⁰

The public image that the Americans desired for a Filipino national hero was quite clear. They favored a hero who would not run against the grain of American colonial policy. These acts of the Americans in furtherance of a Rizal cult in the light of their initial policies which required the passage of the Sedition Law prohibiting the advocacy of independence and the law prohibiting the display of the Philippine flags. The heroes who advocated independence were therefore ignored as they were now labeled as bandits, insurrectos, savages, and lawless elements. For to have encouraged a movement to revere Andres Bonifacio⁴¹, Apolinario Mabini⁴² or Macario Sakay⁴³ would not have been consistent with American colonial policy.

Quoting James Le Roy, who worked with the Second Philippine Commission, Constantino further emphasized that it is the imperialistic campaign of the Americans that fueled the creation of the Rizal cult.

³⁸ W. Cameron Forbes, *The Philippine Islands* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928), p. 55. In the book of Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (Quezon City: Malaya Books Inc., 1970), p. 129.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 53. In Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (Quezon City: Malaya Books Inc., 1970), p. 129.

⁴⁰ Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (Quezon City: Malaya Books Inc., 1970), p. 129.

⁴¹ Known as the "Great Plebian", Andres Bonifacio of Tondo, Manila founded the Katipunan in 1892 together with Ladislao Diwa and Teodoro Plata. The Katipunan was a secret patriotic society dedicated to the awakening and liberty of the Filipinos, by arms if necessary.

⁴² Apolinario Mabini of Tanawan, Batangas served as the adviser of Pres. Emilio Aguinaldo's Revolutionary Government. Due to his anti-American imperialistic campaign, he was exiled in Guam.

⁴³ A member of Katipunan, Macario Sakay served as a general in the Philippine Revolution against Spain and in the Philippine-American War. Sakay, along with his men were charged and convicted of the crime of *bandolerismo* by the Americans. In 1907, he was hanged.

The Taft Commission did foster the worship of Rizal. They were glad in 1900 to have one way of giving expression to their sympathies with national ideals, without appearing to favor revolt. Rizal, and a national holiday for him, was just the chance.⁴⁴

Several factors contributed to Rizal's acceptability to the Americans as the official hero of the Philippines. First, he was safely dead by the time the Americans began their aggression so no embarrassing anti-American quotations could ever be attributed to him. Second, Rizal's dramatic martyrdom had already made him the symbol of Spanish oppression. To focus attention on him would serve not only to concentrate Filipino hatred against the former oppressors, it would also blunt their feelings of animosity toward the new conquerors against whom there was still organized resistance at that time. Constantino concluded that the choice for Rizal was a master stroke by the Americans.⁴⁵ The honors bestowed on Rizal were naturally appreciated by the Filipinos who were proud of him. Third, the Americans chiefly emphasized the fact that Rizal was a reformer, not a separatist whose major thesis for reform is education, not a revolution. Such principle was highly congruent with the American imperialistic slogan embodied in the "Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation"⁴⁶ of Pres. McKinley. Rizal could therefore not be invoked on the question of Philippine independence. He could not be a rallying point in the resistance against the Americans but could be a great boost to their pacification campaign. Lastly, it must be realized that the Filipino members of the Philippine Commission were conservative ilustrados. The Americans regarded Rizal as belonging to this class, to the right social class that they were cultivating and building up for leadership.

Yes indeed, although Rizal was already a revered figure and became more so after his martyrdom, it cannot be denied that his pre-eminence among other Filipino heroes was partly the result of American sponsorship and institutionalization.

Conclusion

It has been established that the Filipinos, the Rizalistas in particular have viewed Christ/God within their cultural framework. Anitism, the worship of ancestors has a long tradition in Philippine culture. To the spirits (*anitos* or *nonos*), Filipinos offered sacrifices and foods with the ministrations of the *babaylan* (priestess) serving as shamans or mediums to communicate with the supernatural beings. Notwithstanding they had been Christianized by the Spaniards and the Americans, they still have maintained their indigenous beliefs, or if not, have been able to blend these outside religious outlooks with their own.

⁴⁴ Renato Constantino, *Myths and Reality* (Quezon City: Karrel, Inc., 1992), p. 80.

⁴⁵ Renato Constantino, *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness* (Quezon City: Malaya Books Inc., 1970), p. 130.

⁴⁶ "Benevolent Assimilation Proclamation", also known as the 21 December Proclamation was issued by U.S. Pres. William McKinley during the Philippine-American War. It highlighted the good intentions of the US government to the Filipinos but its nice name did not mask McKinley's deadly decision as he irrevocably declared war on the Filipino people with this proclamation.

Constructing Rizal as Christ and reconstructing Christ as Rizal, give us a clear idea that it is the people themselves who contextualize religion. Filipinizing Christ or making Christ a Filipino, validates the thesis that it is the Filipino people who finally decide what is meaningful and relevant to their spiritual and religious life. The picture of *Jove Rex Al*, Rizal as Christ, is based on what is meaningful and significant in the eyes of the Filipino believers. Thus, culture plays a central role on this as it colors the worldview of the people.

On the otherhand, American hegemony had significantly contributed to this veneration for Rizal by the Filipinos. Through legislations, education, and propaganda machineries, the American colonial officials had succeeded in creating Jose Rizal as a “superhero” whom every Filipino citizen should bow down with. Therefore, the American invasion and conquest of the Philippines had been fueled and facilitated by “imaging” and “representing” Rizal as the most illustrious Filipino who had ever lived, towering above all the Filipino patriots. Thus, I am buying the idea of Renato Constantino that Rizal cult had been encouraged by American imperialism in the Philippines.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Books:

Bennagen, Ponciano L. *Constructing and Reconstructing Meanings: By Whom and For Whom?* in the foreword of the book edited by McAndrew, John P. *Monks, Dreamers, Preachers, and Rebels: Religious Solutions to the Problem of Meaning in a Peripheral Capitalist Society*. Malate, Manila: Asian Social Institute, Inc., 1987.

Constantino, Renato. *Dissent and Counter-Consciousness*. Quezon City: Malaya Books Inc., 1970.

_____. *Myths and Reality*. Quezon City: Karrel, Inc., 1992.

Covar, Prospero R. *Larangan: Seminal Essays on Philippine Culture*. Manila: Sampaguita Press, Inc., 1998.

_____. *Philippine Folk Christianity*. Quezon City: Philippine Social Science Council, 1975.

De los Reyes, Isabelo. *The Religion of the Katipunan or The Old Beliefs of the Filipinos* in the book by Alcantara, Teresita A. et al. *Views on Philippine Revolution Vol. 1*. Quezon City: The Toyota Foundation, UP Press, 2002.

Forbes, Cameron W. *The Philippine Islands*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928.

Foronda, Marcelino A. *Cults Honoring Rizal*. Manila: Garcia Publishing Co., 1961.

Friend, Theodore. *Between Two Empires*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1965.

Hall, Stuart. *Representation and the Media*. Media Education Foundation, 2005.

Ileto, Reynaldo S. *Pasyon and Revolution: Popular Movements in the Philippines 1840-1910*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1979.

Jocano, Landa F. *Filipino Prehistory: Rediscovering Precolonial Heritage*. Metro Manila, Philippines: Punlad Research House, Inc., 2001.

_____. *Philippine Pre-history, An Anthropological Overview of the Beginnings of Filipino Society and Culture*. Quezon City: Philippine Center for

Advanced Studies, 1975.

Jocano, Landa F. ed. *The Philippines at the Spanish Contact: Some Major Accounts of Early Filipino Society and Culture*. Quezon City: Institute of Philippine Studies, Philippine Center for Advanced Studies, UP System, 1975.

McAndrew, John P. ed. *Monks, Dreamers, Preachers, and Rebels: Religious Solutions to the Problem of Meaning in a Peripheral Capitalist Society*. Malate, Manila: Asian Social Institute, Inc., 1987.

Mercado, Leonardo N. *Christ in the Philippines*. Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1982.

_____. *Filipino Religious Psychology*. Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1977.

Ortiz, Tomas. *Practica del Ministerio*. Manila: Convento de Nuestra Señora de los Angeles, 1731.

Plasencia, Juan de. *Customs of the Tagalogs: A Relation*. Manila: in Blair and Robertson, VII, 1589.

Rafael, Vicente L. *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society Under Early Spanish Rule*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 2000.

Tan, Samuel K. *A History of the Philippines*. Quezon City: The University of the Philippines Press, 1987.

Trillana III, Pablo S. *Rizal and Heroic Traditions: A Sense of National Destiny*. Quezon City: New Day Publishers, 2006.

Zaide, Gregorio F. and S. Zaide. *Jose Rizal: Life, Works, and Writings of a Genius, Writer, Scientist, and National Hero*. Quezon City: All-Nations Publishing Co. Inc., 2008.

II. Interviews:

Interview with Engr. Bonifacio T. Rellera, General President of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc. – Malvarosa Faction*, Central Church Headquarter located in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines on May 20, 2011.

Interview with Mrs. Luvisminda Balocon, vice-president of the *Iglesia ng Lipi ni Gat Dr. Jose P. Rizal, Inc.* on May 13, 2011 at the church headquarters located in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines.

Interview with Mr. Norito Cabotaje, member of the Council of Elders of the *Watawat ng*

Lahi-Parabuac Faction and at the same time assistant to Dr. Luis Parabuac, the concurrent leader of the group on May 13, 2011 at the church headquarters located in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines.

Interview with Rev. Vicar Eusebio O. Bolante, Parochial Priest of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc. – Malvarosa Faction*, Central Church Headquarter located in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna on May 20, 2011.

Interview with Rev. Vicar Jose F. Barcelá, one of the parochial priests of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc. (IWLI) – Malvarosa Faction* in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines on May 20, 2011.

Appendix: Pictures



Picture No.1

The author interviewing Rev. Vicar Eusebio O. Bolante, parochial priest of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc.(IWLI) – Malvarosa Faction* at the Central Church Headquarter located in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines on May 20, 2011.



Picture No.2

The researcher continued his inquiry with Father Bolante about the worldviews of the IWL I – Malvarosa Faction.



Picture No.3

Interview with Engr. Bonifacio T. Relleta, General President of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc.* (IWL I) – *Malvarosa Faction*, Central Church Headquarter located in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines on May 20, 2011.



Picture #4

Interview with Rev. Vicar Jose F. Barcelá, one of the parochial priests of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc. (IWLI) – Malvarosa Faction* in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines on May 20, 2011.



Picture No.5

Interview with Mrs. Luvisminda Balocon, vice-president of the *Iglesia ng Lipi ni Gat Dr. Jose P. Rizal, Inc. (ILGDJPRI)* on May 13, 2011 at the ILGDJPRI Church located in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines.



Picture No.6

Inside the ILGDJPRI Church, the researcher posed with Mrs. Balocon



Picture No.7

Interview with Mr. Norito Cabotaje, member of the Council of Elders of the *Samahan ng Watawat ng Lahi – Parabuc Faction* and at the same time assistant to Dr. Luis Parabuc, Sr. on May 13, 2011 at the *Watawat ng Lahi School* located in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna.



Picture No.8

The picture of God Rizal showing God The Father entrusting His power, authority, and right to rule over all the nations and races.



Picture No.9

God Rizal in an altar with an angel besides him



Picture No.10

These are the signs and symbols that one can see in the pulpit inside the church of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc.* (IWLI) – Malvarosa Faction in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines.



Picture No.11

God Rizal being crowned by God The Father with the Philippine Flag on their left side. For the Rizalistas, this symbolizes the Philippines as the new chosen kingdom of God, replacing Israel.



Picture No.12

Andres Bonifacio, the *Supremo* of the Katipunan is believed to be the right hand of Dr. Jose Rizal. For the Rizalistas, he is a saint and one of the members of the *Mga Mahal na Magulang* (Beloved Ancestors).



Picture No.13

The composition of the *Mga Mahal na Magulang* (Beloved Ancestors). See the next picture for the complete list of names of the 15 Beloved Ancestors.



Picture No.14

The (15) Beloved Ancestors: Fr. Mariano Gomez, Fr. Jose Burgos, Fr. Jacinto Zamora, Marcelo del Pilar, Gen. Miguel Malvar, Gen. Gregorio del Pilar, Andres Bonifacio, Graciano Lopez Jaena, Emilio Jacinto, Mariano Ponce, Apolinario Mabini, Antonio Regidor, Antonio Luna, Juan Luna, and Jose Maria Basa. All of them are considered saints.



Picture No.15

The eye inside the triangle symbolizes the *Infinito Dios* (*Bathala*, the Infinite and Almighty God). The three (3) stars inside the triangle signifies the Holy Trinity: God The Father, God The Son, and God The Holy Spirit – Jehovah, Jesus, and Jose. The eight (8) rays signifies the eight (8) archangels who support the earth in its rotation and revolution.



Picture No.16

The Ritual of Baptism solemnized by Rev. Vicar Eusebio O. Bolante of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi, Inc. (IWLI) – Malvarosa Faction* inside its chapel in Bgy. Lecheria, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines.



Picture No.17

For the Rizalistas (Malvarosa and Larino Factions), Gat Arsenio de Guzman is the medium of God Rizal. He is regarded as the real founder of the *Iglesia Watawat ng Lahi* except for the Parabuac Faction. He is mysterious as he concealed to be a woman in the person of Maria Consuelo.



Picture No.18

The Statue of Dr. Jose Rizal standing on the globe (with a skull and stones) and holding a torch.

